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HOW CAN THE AIMS AND PURPOSES OF INSTRUCTION BE MADE MORE VITAL IN ACTUAL PRACTICE?*

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FIRST, BY ACCEPTING AIMS THAT ARE IN THEMSELVES
VITAL

THE aims learned in some philosophies of education and mechanically quoted afterward are unfortunately for the most part not pragmatic—that is to say, they do not guide us to correct action. What is needed in education is a sort of golden rule which will guide without restricting, which will force us to honest thinking about conditions and pupils as they are, freeing us from practices that have no warrant other than tradition. Such a pragmatic statement of purpose will insure that all the good in past or present practice will be preserved; moreover it will free and encourage us to make desirable changes.

No statement of purpose has value, then, unless it guide and stimulate one to action. Although it is recognized that this principle may justify a different set of aims for each individual, the following are proposed as suggestive:

The first duty of the school is to train pupils to perform better the desirable activities that they are likely to perform anyway.

Another duty of the school is to reveal higher types of activity and to make them both desired and to an extent possible.

Acceptance of these theses incurs the obligation to list by inventory the desirable knowledges, attitudes, prejudices, skills, and habits which men and women have and should have in our democracy. It necessitates our incorporating these into our courses of study, as rapidly as we may with effectiveness.

SECOND, BY INCREASING THE AMOUNT AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SKILLED SUPERVISION OF INSTRUCTION

Outside of teaching and of routine clerical duties, from which he should be largely relieved, a principal directly or through assistants, should administer the high school, direct its social life, and supervise instruction. Much observation and inquiry lead to the conclusion that supervision by principals is done less

regularly and less well than are the other duties—partly because its results are less immediately obvious but chiefly because it is difficult, requiring professional skill and arduous application. Teachers, experienced as well as inexperienced, need the guidance and stimulus which come from a supervision that will urge each one to formulate or to accept statements of purpose for his subject that are specific, definite, and worthy, that will insist on such purposes being sought in each recitation unit, and that will show by measurements the results of such purposeful instruction. It is reasonable to expect a principal to give the major part of his time and effort to the improvement of teachers in service.

THIRD, BY SEEING THAT SPECIFIC, DEFINITE, AND
WORTHY PURPOSES ARE PROPOSED BY PUPILS
OR ELSE COMPREHENDED, APPROVED, AND
ADOPTED BY THEM AS THEIR OWN

This means that pupils should be prepared to do better what they will be constantly called on in actual life to do—find problems and devise means of effectively solving them. Nowhere except in the classroom or in the lowest grades of employment are human beings regularly told exactly what to do, furnished all the necessary data and only those, and expected to find their satisfaction in the approval of a taskmaster. It is difficult to see how we may expect pupils to develop initiation and independence unless they are trained to propose problems or, after comprehending, to approve those that are given them and then intelligently to devise means of economical solution. With such a plan of work, we should go a long way toward ridding the schools of the wasteful and all too common spirit of “getting-by.”

SPEAKING of education, Mr. Frederick Harrison says: “It makes women conceited and unkind. It makes men dull and pedantic.” With what the *New York Times* is pleased to term “comic petulance,” Mr. Harrison further says he is opposed to education for the foregoing reasons.

*Abstract of an address at the Pennsylvania State Educational Congress.